

AMAA NEWS



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Nativity Scene Presented by Armenian Evangelical Youth in Gumri, Armenia.

233-2000

Mary, Martha and Missions

by Peter Kougasian

Editor's Note: The following is adapted from Peter Kougasian's message given at the Armenian Missionary Association of America's 80th Annual Meeting Worship Service held on October 17, 1999 at the United Armenian Congregational Church, Hollywood, CA. Mr. Kougasian is an active member of the Armenian Evangelical Church of New York, and currently serves as a Vice President of AMAA. For twenty years, he has been an assistant district attorney in the office of Robert M. Morgenthau, District Attorney for the County of New York. Currently, he serves as a bureau chief in the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor.

"Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her' (Luke 10:38-42).

Of all the people we read about in Scripture, I think Martha has most captured my sympathy. She reminds me of the ladies in so many of our Armenian families, the ladies who spend days preparing for company. And when the company comes, and everyone is enjoying the good times and excitement, with the men in the living room playing *tavloo*, she still spends the whole day cooking and serving and cleaning, which reminds me of an old Armenian expression, "When the lady of the house sits down with her guests, it's time to go home." Clearly, poor Martha was one of these ladies.

Why couldn't Christ see the injustice of what was happening to her? Martha didn't enjoy cooking and cleaning. But she sacrificed to make His visit more comfortable. Why did Christ praise Mary, and criticize Martha?

What Christ saw was that Martha, notwithstanding all her hard work, had withheld from Him precisely what He sought: her presence, her witness. He had come not to enjoy a good meal or to sleep in a comfortable bed, but to transform her life. And so He said to Martha that all of her hard work, all of her concerns, all of her flitting back and forth – these were all distractions. Because, Christ said, there is need of only one thing.

And what is that one thing of which we are so desperately in need?

We hear it in the plaintive longing of the Psalms: "Why dost thou stand afar off, O Lord?" This was the voice of the Old Testament. This was the voice of a people in need. And so, for millennia, the Jews struggled, as no people ever had before, to reach communion with God. They walked across a desert, they climbed the mountain top, and they even burned their offerings so the smoke might rise up to heaven and please a distant God.

And then, suddenly, came Jesus, the Son of Man, the word made flesh. And that changed everything. No longer was God a remote presence, a distant father. Christ was a living, vital young man. And He dwelled not on some shrouded mountain top, or in some monastery, but in the city – and then, scripture tells us, He left the city and entered the village, the village of Martha and Mary, and came right into their homes. So important was it that God be an immediate presence in their lives, that Christ had come all that way. We live in an age in which it would be truly remarkable to learn that a doctor had made a house call. The Son of Man had come all the way into Martha's home, and yet Martha hid herself in the kitchen! No wonder Christ was displeased!

As we conclude our annual meeting, as we prepare to return our rental cars and board our planes and disperse to our homes, let us pause to ask ourselves: in the days ahead, will we be Mary, or will we be Martha? Will ours be a mission in which we share the love of God in immediate and powerful ways? Or will we be so busy with the work of the church that we forget that one thing, of which we are all in need?

This is, of course, an age of milestones.



Next year, the world will set aside the objections of the mathematicians and the archaeologists, and declare that the first year of the new millennium marks the 2000th anniversary of Christ's birth. And the year following, we Armenians will celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the founding of the Armenian Apostolic Church, of the identification of the Armenian people with the Christian faith. How should we commemorate these anniversaries? How can we celebrate like Mary, rather than like Martha?

We can begin by remembering that the Christian faith began with all the simplicity and immediacy of Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus; it began with the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord", it is a faith proclaimed by a man from Nazareth who remarked that unlike a fox, unlike even a bird, he had no place to lay his head; it is a faith spread by itinerant apostles who traveled the length and breadth of the Roman empire, not knowing where they would be spending the next night – and often spending that night in a prison cell. This is a faith of believers who for generations made no effort to mark their holy places, because their faith was so intense that the apocalypse often seemed imminent. These are the Marys. These are the ones who lived so immediately in God's presence that there was no 5-year-plan, no 10-year-plan, no permanent endowment fund.

But as the Christian faith stretched into the ages, the builders took over. They sought permanence, they built vast structures which they hoped would convey by their very greatness some sense of God's majesty. They coined the phrase, *laborare est orare* – to labor is to pray. These were the Marthas. And what did their labors create? In Paris

today, we can see Notre Dame Cathedral, built in the early centuries of this millennium by masons who laid foundation

Serving my Lord in the Land of my Heritage

by David Torounian

It was in three generations after the genocide before anyone from my family returned to Armenia, and my first time on a mission trip to serve my Lord God in the land of my heritage. I was emotional thinking it took this long to heal some of the wounds of the genocide in our family. Killing touches all future generations and we are not immune to its effects, yet Christ can remove all wounds through his love. As a missionary I was most happy that it was the Lord that returned me to serve my people

by His grace and mercy.

I fell in love with the country, my country Armenia. I never thought that it would be so beautiful and the people so open and loving to each other and to myself as an outsider. They are a people who have struggled through physical hardships, endured, and with great love in their hearts are serving the Lord with gladness. I have seen orphans, who lived without hope, grow up to serve the Lord. There are little children in the local community who know their Bible stories, and some who can recite the Psalms by heart, putting me to shame. Single mothers

whose husbands have left them, or died in war or earthquake, struggle to earn a living. Families live in one flat, with grandparents in one room, parents in another, and newlyweds in yet another room with their baby. As there are few jobs and no money to start a business, the people seek out a living on an average \$10 US per month, yet they serve the Lord with gladness.

Healthcare is not affordable for the average person. Most wait a long time to have an operation and others die because they can't afford one. One lady had an open six-inch wound that wouldn't heal. She couldn't

stones knowing that neither they, nor their children, nor their children's children, nor even their children's grandchildren, would ever see the work completed. And in the world of the intellect, what did their labors create? We might peruse St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, a massive and scholarly work of philosophical genius which sought exhaustively to illuminate the scripture through the painstaking application of eternal principles of logic. What did their artistic labors create? We as Armenians might choose to listen to the *badarak*, which surely must count as one of the greatest achievements of liturgical music in any culture, so venerated by Armenians that it has endured through the ages and continues to move us now, even now, in our postmodern society.

In stone, in creed, in music, these are the achievements of the great builders. And certainly, each of these towering achievements has the power to inspire us, to uplift us, to educate us, to make us feel humility in the Lord's presence.

But 150 years ago, when our brothers and sisters in the evangelical movement asked what is essential to our faith, they embraced none of these achievements. They turned away from the great cathedrals. They set aside the great documents of religious dogma. They began to explore new forms of religious expression and sacred music, outside of the received tradition. Why? Why did they eschew all that was magnificent and magisterial? They did so because they sensed that as great as all of these cre-

ations were, that they had become impediments to something even greater – the immediate relationship between God and the believer. There was no denying, the great builders of Christianity had created an empire – a civilization – and a worldwide church. But along the way they had been distracted by many things, when there is, as Christ taught us, the need of only one thing. This same evangelical enthusiasm animated the founders of the AMAA. Recent immigrants to America, unable to muster a budget even of \$10,000, forced to abandon their first fundraising drive, these inspired Armenian Christians still set about to do no less than spread the gospel, to attack ignorance and to alleviate poverty and to fight injustice – halfway across the world. And I issue to you this challenge: can you find a single Armenian family in the diaspora today whose lives have not been directly touched by the spirit of these pioneers?

I believe that spirit still animates the AMAA today.

But as we grow, as the AMAA becomes richer, its missions more ambitious, its reach more extensive, I wonder, what is to become the appropriate measure of our success? What we learn from the story of Martha and Mary is that the numbers, the budgets, the buildings – none of these ultimately matter in God's eyes. What will make the AMAA a success or failure in the new millennium is whether each of us, each of us in this sanctuary, has a personal relationship with God, and whether, in everything we do in our lives, we convey God's love, offer God's

forgiveness, and embody God's care for each person that we meet – in short whether, over and above all our works, we are fully present in the lives of our brothers and sisters, the people Christ called our neighbors. Because the presence ultimately is what matters.

Dr. Carolann Najarian recently published her memoirs of countless medical relief trips into Armenia in the months and years following the terrible earthquake. She tells the story of one village, which had been so wracked by the earthquake that even their physical and medical needs were dwarfed by the psychological trauma which had scarred a generation. "Something was happening to these children," she writes, "something unlike anything they had ever experienced." Dr. Najarian and her team made their way to the remote village and then they wondered, where is the need greatest, where do we begin? And so they went into one of the schools, and they assembled the teachers, and they asked them a simple question: how do we help you? And one of the teachers said, "Just the fact that you have come all the way here, all the way to Ashotsk, is enough. We will find a way to survive."

The Great Physician now is near. And when we feel ourselves in the immediacy of Christ's love, when we feel God's abiding presence, when we feel ourselves at Christ's feet, we too say, we will find a way to survive. For 1700 years this has been the witness of the Armenian people. This is the gift we have to share with the nations. This is why Armenians are, and should always be missionaries. □



David Torounian (left) preaching at the Armenian Evangelical Church of Vanatzor. Peter Nigoghosian translates his message into Armenian.

afford the \$70 US for a skin graft and was waiting on the AMAA (Armenian Missionary Association of America) support list for the operation. An orphan boy, God bless him, had goiter, an inflammation of the glands in his throat, and was choking for weeks because he didn't have the \$50 US to have the glands removed so I paid it. Another boy couldn't go to school because he had no clothes to wear, his parents were both bedridden and could not work. All he needed was \$50 US to clothe him for the year so I paid it.

The collapse of the Soviet Union has left Armenia without infrastructure. Factories are closed, street lights are burned out, unfinished high-rise buildings stand as they were left ten years ago, yet the people are rebuilding the country literally from the ground up. The water fountains are being fixed and the flower beds getting cleaned up. The people have micro-businesses and sell their wares in local markets. They are learning on their own, as there are few mentors, role models and entrepreneurs to guide them. Armenia is in transition and in five years you will not see the outward signs of these struggles.

Needs are so great! The money that is donated to the (Armenian Missionary Association of America) goes directly to the people. I've seen it. They are doing good work of helping people spiritually and physically. I am proud to be a servant with the AMAA in Christ's service. I love the people

of Armenia, and I have been bitten by the "Armenia Bug" (the kind that makes you want to go back, to serve).

I was stationed in the city of Vanatzor (2 ½ hours by car, north of Yerevan) under the direction of Pastor Samuel Giragosian. Peter Nigosian (Toronto) was replacing him while he was at camp for the summer and I was assisting Peter in counseling and visitations. Peter spoke most Sunday mornings and seven people made commitments of faith in Christ. Peter is well respected by the church community. I had an opportunity to give my testimony on one Sunday. I helped the music director to set up their new synthesizer and taught them how it works. I led a small group at a summer camp in Stepanakert (Karabagh) for teenage children from the area, most of whom were orphans. Even though I had difficulties with the language, I was made to feel welcome and I felt part of the group, which was important to me. The children are so obliging and so full of affection that you cannot feel out of place. The young people all help out much more than they do in Canada. I was quite touched by their dedication.

Both Peter and I had the opportunity to give a small word of encouragement at the baptism of 154 new believers at Lake Sevan. They were all dressed in white, and what a sight to see! We participated by taking them four-at-a-time to be baptized that afternoon, as an outward testimony of their inward salvation in Christ.

One modest project the AMAA had in Yerevan was publishing a new Armenian hymnal for the use of all the Evangelical and Baptist Churches in Armenia. I purchased and configured a computer workstation to record, edit, and print music from a synthesizer (keyboard). Then I showed the music pastor, David Torosian (Bethel Baptist Church in Yerevan), how to use it. In the mornings Peter and I prayed before leaving the house and God blessed our day by bringing the right people across our paths to get our tasks done. God's timing was amazing!

Peter and I visited his relatives and their friends. He went through the "Evangelism Explosion" program in Armenian, while I was prompting him in English, on how to have assurance of salvation in their lives. The complete family (all 8) from the grandparents to the grandchildren made professions of salvation in Christ Jesus that night. What a blessing!

Peter and I witnessed at the A&L Business Center (Vanatzor), a non-profit small business association that helps companies in the province of Lori establish good business practices. They have a small computer network that links up the government, libraries, businesses and individuals to the internet, which facilitates communications locally and throughout the world. A&L has secured my services as a computer consultant and I am in the process of gathering up a proposal to establish further applications to benefit the business community, and indirectly the people.

There are many opportunities to witness and people are open to hearing the gospel. Some understand, others know only their traditions, and still others don't know in their heart what to believe. For seventy years they have been blinded by communism, the church has been suppressed, people have forgotten their Christian roots as they are lost in daily struggles. Now cults of all types are moving in, misleading the people, and causing confusion. It is time for the harvest in Armenia, and its people have never been so open to salvation.

I praise God for all of the prayers that sustained me and Peter throughout this trip. We were blessed the entire time and I felt God's leading us daily. His timing is perfect. I want to return next summer and work in Armenia again. Maybe others can plan to come too! They need our support; they really need it. □

San Francisco Church Sends Youth Group for Mission Work in Armenia

For the past several summer, members of the Youth Group of the Calvary Armenian Congregational church of San Francisco have undertaken mission trips to Armenia. This year's participants were Sam Albarian, Nishan Khoshafian, Ara Kullukian, Nora Minassian and Armen Simonian. They spent three weeks in Armenia last July, serving as facilitators in the AMAA's Vacation Bible School program. They were assigned to the towns of hrazdan and Pureghavan, where they worked with children between the ages of six and twelve.

The following excerpts from a report submitted to the AMAA by the young "missionaries" illustrate their experiences in Armenia.

"Our work began in earnest the second week with the children in Hrazdan, and we finally realized that yes, there is a lot to be done! The young children that were so happy to be hearing the Word of God. They were so enthusiastic. Our experience with local people was very different from what one encounters in the United States. We would walk on the streets and meet people and they'd want to hear what we were saying."

"I feel that we accomplished the most during the final week. We were in a small town called Pureghavan, a city where the AMAA is starting an outreach effort for the first



The San Francisco Church youth team in Armenia. Back row (L to R): Sam Albarian, Armen Simonian, Nishan Khoshafian. Front row (L to R): Tamar Paylakian, Nora Minassian and Ara Kullukian.

time. The children did not know much about Jesus. They really needed to hear the message we were bringing. In a few days they were singing songs and reciting Psalms, and hopefully learning the good news of what Christ has done for all of us."

"It's very encouraging to be part of this

kind of work, seeing firsthand what people need and trying to help them meet those needs. We should all pray for the groups that continue to go and work there, and for all the children we worked with, so that they remember what they learned and they continue to grow in Christ." □

Dedication of the New Facilities of the Decines Church

On Sunday, November 14, 1999, the Armenian Evangelical Church of Decines, France celebrated the 70th anniversary of its founding, and held the dedication of its renovated premises. About 270 people attended this service of thanksgiving, which was enlivened by the large number of the Decines congregation and by the many Armenian Evangelical pastors present.

The expansion of the premises filled a need that had been felt for several years – a

multipurpose room for:

- Children (meeting on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.)
- Teenagers (meeting on Saturdays from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.)
- Sunday School (meeting from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.)
- Monthly meetings of church members.

The project initially called for the construction of a room, 55 square meters, at a cost of FF250,000. Thanks to the generos-

ity of donors, for an additional FF200,000, the church was able to renovate its old building (the roof, facade, main entrance, insulation, movable partition, electric wiring, heating system, toilets, floor tiles and railings). The total cost came to FF450,000 of which the AMAA contributed US\$24,000 (about FF150,000).

At the dedication service the offering amounted to FF20,000. This sum made possible the renovation of the kitchen of the church.

The church in Decines is a branch congregation of the Armenian Evangelical Church of Lyon. The pastor of the church is Rev. Krikor Khayiguian. □

AMAA-Sponsored Christmas Programs in Armenia

Each year, for the past several years, the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) has celebrated Christmas and proclaimed the Christmas message in Armenia through a series of special programs presented throughout the country.

Last December and January (Christmas in Armenia falls on January 6) 58 AMAA Christmas programs – 48 in Armenia and ten in Karabagh – were held in 33 cities and towns in Armenia and six in Karabagh. The programs were attended, in aggregate, by more than 20,000 children, and numerous parents. Over 13,000 children received Christmas presents, which included an activity booklet with Christmas themes.

Each program featured a children's choir, recitations, a musical drama depicting the nativity, a playlet with a Christian theme and a celebration of Armenia's Christian heritage. The programs were supervised and directed by a large number of local AMAA staff and volunteer supporters, including local Sunday School children and children's choirs. Coordinating the entire effort were Mr. Harout Nercessian, AMAA Deputy Representative in Armenia, and Mrs. Tamar Vasoyan, an AMAA Christian Education Worker in Armenia.

Local authorities in most towns welcomed the Christmas programs and many attended in person. In most cities and towns the AMAA programs were the only public celebration of Christmas and its message. For many children, these programs were their

first exposure to the Christmas story and for many more it was their only celebratory activity during the Christmas season.

Mr. Nercessian concluded his report on these Christmas programs with the following words: "The AMAA Christmas programs bring blessings to both children and adults. These programs offer unique opportunities to speak about the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and demonstrate the reality about God's love. On behalf of the thousands of children and adults who attended our Christmas programs this year, our AMAA Armenia staff joins me in expressing deep gratitude to those who helped us through their prayers, loving labors and financial gifts." □



Evangelical Youth of Yerevan Hold Special Christmas Campaign



Evangelical Youth visiting a shut-in lady in Yerevan on Christmas eve.

This year, the youth group of the Evangelical Church of Armenia in Yerevan marked the Christmas holiday with a special campaign of spreading Christmas

cheer to elderly people and needy families.

The members and leaders of the Yerevan Church Youth Group visited shut-ins and destitute families, and shared with them their

love, smiles, voices and good will. Although some elderly people were initially hesitant to open their doors, they were all ultimately happy to have been remembered. One of the visited elderly ladies who has a terminal illness and no relatives, expressed her gratitude for the loving spirit of the youth with emotional praises to God. Many of the destitute families were also given Christmas gifts.

All the participating youth were blessed by the experience, and they became a blessing to others with their prayers, scripture readings and Christmas carols. They all served as an effective way of providing encouragement, fellowship, love and hope to people who otherwise live in a constant state of hopelessness and helplessness.

The real spirit of Christmas was both experienced and expressed through this special Christmas campaign. Every participating youth was touched by the Spirit, and every visited person felt God's love and grace.

The AMAA, which helped organize the youth group, has a year-round visitation program to train young boys and girls for Christian ministry, to give them a chance to make a difference in their community, and to provide them with an opportunity to have a positive Christian witness in their society. □

AMAA Clinic in Yerevan Offers Various Health Care Services

In 1999, the AMAA's clinic in Yerevan was expanded to include a physician, dentist, psychologist, pharmacist and receptionist.

Thanks to a generous donation by Nerses and Arpine Aynilian of Fort Lee, NJ, the clinic is now housed in a permanent building, next to the Yerevan headquarters of the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA). The clinic operates Monday through Friday from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Its director is Dr. Nazeli Sarkissian, who is also the clinic's physician.

During the past three months, the clinic was visited 763 times by about 170 patients. Most of the patients have chronic illnesses, such as hypertension, heart disease, peptic

ulcer, diabetes, etc. Most patients are elderly and cannot afford to buy the medication they need.

Dr. Souren Tchshmaritian, the clinic's dentist, reports that during the past three months 315 children were treated in the course of 400 visits. The dental clinic is currently dedicated to providing dental checkups and treatment to all of the children in the AMAA's Child Sponsorship Program.

These children come from families that are among the neediest in Armenia. In virtually all cases, the AMAA's dental clinic is their only access to dental care and treatment.

Dr. Ara Chalikian, the clinic's psychologist, also limits his practice, for the time

being, to children in the AMAA's Child Sponsorship Program and their families. During the past three months he provided psychological treatment to 17 children in the course of 44 sessions. He also provides counseling to members of the children's families.

The clinic also manages the "Isomil" (milk substitute) program that provides Isomil for infants who cannot tolerate milk. Clinic members review applications for the program and periodically visit the families to establish the need for Isomil. Those who meet the requirements are enrolled in the program and provided with a supply of Isomil on a regular basis. The program covers 400 infants in Armenia and 150 in Karabagh.

The AMAA's clinic provides its services without charge to children (and their families) in the Association's Child Sponsorship Program, local residents, and poor people, whose needs often exceed the resources that the clinic offers. □

AMAA Representatives in Armenia Visit West Coast

Last October, the annual meeting of the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) was held on the West Coast. Participating in that meeting were the AMAA's representatives in Armenia, Rev. Dr. René Léonian and Mr. Harout Nercessian. Following the meeting, Mr. Nercessian spent five weeks visiting the Armenian Evangelical church and lay leaders and organizations in Los Angeles, Fresno and San Francisco. He delivered sermons at Sunday services and gave talks – illustrated with a video – about the AMAA's activities in Armenia. He also met with individuals and groups in private homes.

Mr. Nercessian's purpose was to disseminate information about the AMAA's programs in Armenia, answer questions and talk to individuals who expressed an interest in serving in Armenia. His sermons and presentations were well received by his audiences and enhanced their awareness of the extent of spiritual and physical needs of our people in Armenia and what the AMAA was doing to meet those needs. Mr. Nercessian also sounded out individuals involved in education to see if they had any interest in serving in Armenia, particularly at the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Armenia in Yerevan.

Before flying back to Armenia, Mr. Nercessian spent a week on the East Coast. Based at the AMAA Headquarters in Paramus, NJ, he conferred with the AMAA's Executive Director and met with a number of people who are active or potential supporters of AMAA programs in Armenia. □



Rev. Dr. René Léonian and Mr. Harout Nercessian with the faithful members of the AMAA chapter of Cilicia Church in Pasadena, CA (top); Rev. Dr. René Léonian and Mr. Nercessian with Rev. Dr. Yeghia Babikian of the Emmanuel Bible College (middle, left); Revs. Janbazian and Léonian with Mrs. Marie Hazarian, a faithful member of the AMAA (middle, right); Revs. Janbazian and Léonian with Apraham Haleblian and Brother Samuel Pambakian of the Armenian Brotherhood Bible Church of Pasadena, CA.

The Evangelical Seminary of Armenia has a New Building

by Guevork Guevorkian

At the beginning of the current academic year the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Armenia (ETSA) moved to a new building, which was purchased by the AMAA. The opening ceremony and the dedication of this new facility took place on September 20, 1999. The event was attended by the students and many guests from Armenia and abroad. Guevork Guevorkian, in his opening speech, mentioned that the new building of the Seminary is a gift the Lord has given through the generosity of the AMAA and the UCBWM Donchian Fund. He also expressed his desire to see this new facility as a place where many Evangelical ministers will get their theological education and will go to the field better prepared for the task of serving people. Rev. René Léonian gave a brief history of the Seminary and presented the academic programs offered by ETSA. He also mentioned that the Board of the Seminary has decided to add a Master of Arts in Theology program starting September 2000. Rev. Yuri Avanesyan, the President of the Union of Evangelical Churches in Armenia, focused on the importance of personal character of the students. "Each student," he said, "who will have the privilege of studying in this Seminary, ought to glorify God by his holy living, and ought to be instrumental in the advancement of God's kingdom." Mr. Sergey Vardanian, Deputy Minister of the Religious Affairs said, "I am very happy today in this Seminary, where, under the sight of biblical Mount Ararat, the heavenly and earthly realities are united. Other participants in the program included Rev. Megerdich Karagoezian, the President of the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Middle East; Mr. Andrew Torigian, the President of AMAA; Rev. Vahan Tootikian, the Moderator of the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America; Rev. Fr. Nishan Keheyan, the representative of the Armenian Catholic Church. The main speaker was Rev. Movses Janbazian, the Executive Director of the AMAA and the Secretary of the Armenian Evangelical World Council. Rev. Janbazian said: "Brothers and sisters, we praise the Lord for this Seminary. We praise God for making our vision a reality. We express our thanks to all those who directly and indirectly helped us to realize our dream. Among these people are Rev. Yuri Avanesyan, Dr. Yeghia Babikian, Rev. René Léonian, Mr. Harout Nercessian, Mr. Guevork Guevorkian and Mr. Mike Balabanian. We also remember with gratitude the encouragement and generous support received from the United Church Board for World Ministries.

"Beloved, theological education is important, seminary building is important, the academic program is important. However, all these will mean nothing if you, the students, do not understand that before preaching and teaching the gospel, you must come to Jesus Christ. First, it is necessary to come to Jesus



The new building of the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Armenia (above); and Mr. Andy Torigian, President of AMAA, cutting the traditional inaugural ribbon.

Christ. If you have not come to Christ, then your studies and ministry is meaningless; we have nothing to offer you in this seminary. Jesus first called His disciples, and when they came to Him, He taught them and then commissioned them.

"Dear students, prior to everything, come to Christ with humility and great faith; come to Him with honest commitment to Him and His Kingdom. Only if you come to Christ, will this Seminary become a blessing to you and to our churches."

After the prayer of dedication, offered by Rev. Janbazian, the guests had a chance to see the building and talk with the students. The new facility offers new possibilities for extra-curricular activities in the Seminary. Beside the regular classes, the Seminary can assume an active role in leadership development and training of church workers through seminars, lectures and retreats. □

Rev. Tootikian Honored



Rev. Vahan Tootikian, D. Min., pastor of the Armenian Congregational Church of Greater Detroit, was honored at a testimonial banquet on the 40th anniversary of his pastoral service. This event took place on October 10, 1999, at the Armenian Congregational Church Hall in Southfield, MI.

Brief testimonials and tributes were given to Rev. Tootikian by twelve participants, including, the Rev. Karl V. Avakian, Minister to the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America (AEUNA); the Rev. Harry Missirlian, Minister Emeritus to AEUNA; Dr. Richard Marburger, Chairman and MC; Dr. Robert Kachadourian, Vice Chair and Vice MC; Mayor Donal Fracassi; the Very Rev. Navasart Marodryan; the Very Rev. Anton Saroyan; the Rev. Fr. Garabed Kichakian, Deacon David Terzibashian; Dr. Charles Chambers, President of Lawrence Institute of Technology and Ara Kachadourian.

The AMAA presented a Certificate of Appreciation plaque to Rev. Tootikian, commending him for his loyal service to the Armenian Evangelical Church.

In recognition of Rev. Tootikian's service to his church, the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America and the Armenian Congregational Church of Greater Detroit have established an endowment fund, "The AEUNA Rev. Dr. Vahan Tootikian Armenian Heritage Endowment Fund", whose purpose is "to preserve our precious Armenian Heritage through publishing books, preparing Christian Education curricula, organizing cultural programs, and presenting lectures on Armenian literature, art, music and culture." □

AMAC Holds 15th Anniversary Banquet



(L. to R.) Pastor John Melkonian, Mrs. Kohar Khatchikian, Rev. Movses B. Janbazian, Rev. Mher Khatchikian, Mrs. Vartouhie Jizmejjan and Mr. Mihran Jizmejjan.

The Armenian Missionary Association of Canada (AMAC) held its 15th anniversary meeting and banquet on December 4, 1999, at the Armenian Evangelical Church of Montreal, Canada. At the afternoon business meeting, the AMAC's budget of \$88,000 for the year 2000 was approved, as was a proposal to share the cost of starting an Armenian Evangelical fellowship in Ottawa. The highlight of the evening's well-attended banquet was a talk by Rev. Movses Janbazian, Executive Director of the Armenian Missionary Association of America, and the showing of a video depicting the Association's projects in Armenia. □

Sister Churches

The Missions Committee of the United Armenian Cong'l Church (UACC) of Hollywood, CA, has selected the Armenian Evangelical Church of Nor Marash in Beirut, Lebanon, as its first sister church. Many members of the UACC are from the Middle East and are familiar with the Nor Marash church.

The two churches will exchange prayer calendars, newsletters and activity reports. The UACC also plans to provide financial support for specific programs of its sister church, starting this year with a donation to help revitalize the Beirut church's Sunday School program. □

Avedis Soghomonian, 101 Years Old

Born in Marash, Turkey, on December 25, 1898, Avedis Soghomonian of Dearborn, MI, celebrated his 101st birthday last Christmas.

Now living in St. Sarkis Towers in Dearborn, he attributes his longevity to living a true Christian life.

Soghomonian came to the United States when he was 38, in October 1937. He had attempted to come earlier with family members, he sailed to the United States as a young boy, but was turned away by immigration officials at Ellis Island because of an eye infection.

Soghomonian went to France and was almost 39 years old before he returned to the United States and was admitted.

Ironically, even though he spoke just his native Armenian and some French. He was drafted by the U.S. Army.

He served about six weeks before the military realized the problem and gave him an honorable discharge. He then went to work in the defense industry.

His proudest moment came when he was sworn in as a U.S. citizen. Soghomonian made his living as a tailor and later retired from America Beauty Iron Co.

He was an avid traveler; taking many trips to Europe, South America and Mexico. Soghomonian never married. He has a niece and a nephew living in the area.

He has been a faithful supporter of the AMAA for many years. □

President Robert Kocharian Visits the Leadership of UAECNE

by Paul Haidostian

Armenian President Mr. Robert Kocharian, during a three day state visit to Lebanon, paid a special visit to the headquarters of the Armenian Evangelical Church in the Middle East on Wednesday, February 16, 2000. There, he was met by the President of the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East (UAECNE), the Rev. Megrdoch Karagoezian, Chairman of the Central Committee the Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian, Lebanese Deputy Mr. Apraham Dedeyan, Haigazian University President Rev. Dr. John Khanjian, Rev. Soghomon Kilaghbian, Rev. Robert Sarkissian, and Dr. Yervant Kassouny.

On his way through the courtyard, President Kocharian was greeted by enthusiastic delegations representing all Armenian Evangelical schools in Lebanon, youth organizations and Haigazian University, and to their excitement he paused before them for a minute and gave a few encouraging comments.

During the meeting, the Rev. Karagoezian greeted President Kocharian and the accompanying official delegation warmly on behalf of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, and Australia. Rev. Karagoezian thanked President Kocharian for his visit highlighting His Excellency's efforts to uphold liberty and democracy in Armenia, and



Left to right: Mr. Vartan Oskanian, President Robert Kocharian, Rev. Megrdoch Karagoezian, Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian.

specially his leadership in strengthening the ties between Armenia and the Diaspora. He especially mentioned the case of Lebanon where Lebanese citizens of Armenian descent enjoy all the rights and privileges that are guaranteed by the Constitution, the proof being the Armenian schools, churches, and institutions which actively participate in the rebuilding of Lebanon and its vitality.

After concluding his remarks, Rev. Karagoezian presented President Kocharian with a commemorative gift and then asked

Dr. Khanjian to present the armor of Haigazian University to the President, as a token of the love that ties the only Armenian university in the Diaspora to the motherland. President Kocharian, in his turn, expressed his joy for being with his Armenian Evangelical hosts, greatly appreciated the positive mission and contribution of the Armenian Evangelical Church in Armenia and elsewhere, and honored the leadership of the UAECNE with a distinguished Armenian work of art, a copper embossment by Anatoly Avedian. □

AMAA SPECIAL LECTURES MARK THE EPOCHAL YEAR 2000

- **Dr. Vigen Guroian**, Professor of Theology and Ethics at Loyola College in Maryland, and on the faculty of the Ecumenical Institute of Theology at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Maryland, will speak on "*Genocide: A View from the Cross*." (Friday, February 25, 2000).
- **The Rev. Dr. Carnegie Calian**, President of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, will speak on "*Survival or Revival: Challenges and Opportunities Facing the Church*." (Monday, March 27, 2000).
- **Professor Gevorg Kherlopian**, formerly of the State University of Armenia in Yerevan, will discuss "*Early Christianity in Armenia*." (Saturday, April 29, 2000).
- **Rev. Dr. Manuel Jinbashian**, Director of Bible Translation a Division of the United Bible Society based in Strasbourg, France, will speak on "*Translating the Bible into Armenian Over the Centuries*." (Friday, May 12, 2000).

The lectures will take place at the AMAA Headquarters (31 West Century Road, Paramus, NJ) at 6:30 p.m. For directions to the AMAA Headquarters, please call (201) 265-2607. All are cordially invited to attend.

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SUMMER CAMPS IN ARMENIA AND KARABAGH

Although it is now winter, we are preparing for next summer's camp programs in Armenia, Karabagh and Georgia. There are two types of camps: (1) summer camps, where children spend 5-7 days in a supervised camp environment, and (2) day camps, where children spend 5-7 days in a supervised camp environment but return home at the end of each day. The AMAA has been operating these camps since 1990.

These camps are important – very important. During their stay, the children participate in sports and arts and crafts activities. They associate with other children in their age group, and enjoy nutritious meals and snacks, a comfortable bed and fresh air. They also learn about their Christian heritage and about Jesus Christ. Each child is also given a physical exam by the camp doctor. The camps provide a welcome change from the hardships and privations that these children endure throughout the rest of the year. We expect to accommodate more than 6,000 children next summer.

The logistics of operating these camps are formidable. A staff of workers – cooks, cleaners, drivers, etc. – has to be hired; over a hundred volunteer camp counselors – from Armenia, North America, Europe and the Middle East – recruited and trained; the children selected, assembled and transported; and the entire operation coordinated and supervised. It costs about US \$40 per child per session to operate a summer camp, and

about \$25 per child per session for a day camp. To meet these costs, the AMAA depends on its members, friends, affiliated churches and concerned Christians. We hope you feel as we do about the importance of these summer camps in the lives of Armenia's children, and appeal to you to "sponsor" as many of these children as you are able by donating the appropriate multiples of \$40 or \$25. We can assure you, based on our nine years of experience in operating summer camps in Armenia, that your donation will have a dramatic impact on young lives.

Yes, I would like to "sponsor" children to attend summer camps in Armenia.

Enclosed is my donation of \$ _____ for

_____ Children @ \$40 each for day/night camps.

_____ Children @ \$25 each for day camps.

Name _____

Address _____

(Make tax deductible donations to AMAA earmarked for Armenia summer camps, and mail to 31 W. Century Rd., Paramus, NJ 07652.)

If you have any questions, please call or write to the Executive Director of the AMAA.

Armenian Missionary Association of America
31 West Century Road
Paramus, NJ 07652

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